

# Consensus: What is it? How do you do it?

*In order to make progress, decisions need to be made. One method of making a decision is called consensus. It defines a specific degree of commitment with certain responsibilities.*

**Consensus means:** Whatever is stated (and subsequently written down as the recommendation/decision of the group) is *something that every person present “can live with”* AND *is willing to work to accomplish*. It does not mean that every person in the group will be 100% happy with the decision.

**A group achieves consensus by...** starting with someone recommending a course of action and then, using the discipline of the “Round,” to checking if that recommendation is something the rest of the group can live with.

**If someone says they cannot live with the recommendation/decision,** it is that person’s responsibility to offer a version that they CAN live with (and which they reasonably think the others can live with as well). At that point the members of the group are asked if this is something that everyone can live with. If someone says “no” then the process repeats itself. This goes on until the recommendation/decision is something everyone can live with.

**This means...** Although some persons may not be 100% in agreement with the recommendation/decision, they will commit to carrying out their responsibilities for implementing it and will accurately report to others the decision that was reached without undermining it.

**Many times people complain that consensus takes too long and is too much work.** This can be a legitimate complaint, although experience has demonstrated that consensus on matters of importance takes no more time or effort than the discussion usually associated with passing motions and voting. Consensus almost invariably saves time in the long run because when all is said and done there will be no faction that then attempts to undermine the decision.

**Occasionally consensus cannot be reached.** Then a voting process may have to be used or a minority report included in any documentation of the decision.

**The value of consensus** lies in its ability to reduce the “Win/Lose” quotient of a deliberation and increase the quotient of “Win/Win.”

**The secret to consensus** is to stay focused on and advocate for your interests and back away from your positions.